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## La Vie Parisienne

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OFFENBACH, AS MILORD L'ARSOUILLE from the painting by Gustave Doré

Bulloz photo



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## To my friend LOUIS KENTNER





Yesterday, London seemed dark and interminable through the windows of a four-wheeler cab. The area of bright lights reached to Piccadilly and no further. For one must think of oneself, on that evening, as the hero or phlegmatic Englishman of Jules Verne, dining early in—would it be the Reform Club—dining early and not speaking to his neighbour. This is a typical figure known to all who have read Round the World in Eighty Days. For that book of adventure begins and ends, it will be remembered, in a club in Pall Mall.

Dinner, at half past five or six o'clock, consisted of mutton soup, a cutlet—only, due to

Sover the famous chef, it would be a cotelette Reform—roast partridge and greengage tart. Afterwards, it was a matter of smoking and reading the papers. For a moment we may consider that interior of Roman architecture, its arcaded court, the whiskered waiters and still more hirsute members, the solid bookshelves and chairs of solid mahogany. The frock coat was ubiquitous and a top hat hung on every hat peg in the hall. Each of these members, this was the symbol, had his chambers or his home, inviolate and unmentioned by him. But, now, having slipped into the clothes of this strange, top-hatted individual, we ask for a cab and drive home slowly through the night. Pall Mall and St. James's Street are deserted. Military tailors, Lock's the hatter, wine merchants, shops for sporting guns and for fishing tackle, line both sides of the street. It is a world of men. But there are lights at the corner, looking along Piccadilly. Down there lay the heart or lifeblood of the town. It was burning, burning, in a yellow incandescence. It had a million gas lamps and a million oil lamps.

In all this immense town, the big city of the

world, there are few theatres and little gaiety. Down in that direction, the huge glass lamps flare outside the public houses; the prostitutes wait on the wet pavements, prostitutes in bonnets, straw bonnets that frame in the face and make it virginal. Gin and whisky are the vices of the town. But, of its squalor and immorality there is nothing left. No one is alive, now, to tell us. We have to guess at the saturnalia of the slums, at the blind drunk Saturday nights with every penny spent and nothing left for the home.

But, instead, our way leads down Knights-bridge or the new South Kensington. The streets of blinds and curtains come. There are long enfilades of stucco'd porches, all alike; so identical, indeed, that upon a Sunday morning, you can watch every family as it goes to church, or comes back for its Sunday luncheon. These churches, as frequent as the mosques of Cairo, or Stamboul, are of pattern Gothic, in grey stone, with no aim at beauty. To-night, the grey stone spire loses itself in fog. The first of the winter fogs is coming, and the church is dead and empty till next Sabbath. But,

in view of to-morrow's foreign clime, we have a vision of this square in summer, on a morning when the chestnuts are in leaf with every candle lit, and lilac, dark red or white, blows above the railings. Then, there were striped awnings, carriage wheels flashed by like spokes of gold, the painted railings glittered. That was not long ago; but, now, it is darkening into winter. And here, at a porch, or any porch, we part, for we are to meet again in the morning. It is Paddington or Pimlico, Belgravia or South Kensington. It is all the same. They are all alike. But there is packing to do, for, to-morrow, we start early. To-night, if you open your bedroom window over London, there is a reddened sky, red as if with Bengal lights, and the roar of the town. And, now and again, from nearer, the clop clop clopping of a horse and cab. This only; and the tapping of the window blind.

In the morning, it is a drive of forty minutes to Charing Cross to take the train to Dover. We move out at a snail's pace on the iron bridge above the river; we see suburbs, apple orchards, and the oasthouse like a dovecot, a beehive, like a cowled kitchen of some medieval monastery standing in the parabolas among the hop poles —down the twinkling lines of them, for ever changing. Then, the white cliffs, two hours on the Channel, and the sandy dunes of Calais. And, after this, the endless plain of Picardy, Amiens and its smoky station, and, at last, Chantilly, green woods and viaducts, a château to one side or the other, Creil and more woods, and then allotment lands. This is a sign that Paris is near. There are market gardens, more houses; we cross a bridge above a street of little shops. The black walls of the Gare du Nord begin, black with soot and steam. They hide houses which are drab white and paper thin. Their thinness, in fact, gives a nervous horror of what the noise must be within, the din of the trains and depression of the thin, thin rooms. But the houses fall back to either side. A platform like a long thin spike advances. Its roof comes out to shelter us. The main roof opens and the train stands still. We have arrived in Paris.

It would be easy, now, after disputing with the porters, to drive into the lit streets to a hotel. But, instead, we change the station. It is the Gare St. Lazare and no longer the Gare du Nord. There is reason for this, as there is for every folly. The platforms are crowded; but at the exit of the station, close to the booking office, a space is cleared. And it is here that the action begins.

At once, this mere transference from one station to another gives the unreality that we want. It is no longer a particular station but the pattern of arrival. Also, its translation out of reality on to the stage gives it a ghostly or intermediate existence in the sphere of time. It is the night of 31st October, 1866, the first performance of La Vie Parisienne; but, also, it is the summer day of that same year depicted in the action. In this way we have the freedom of reality and unreality. We both witness this Scene One in the station and are participants as well. Our comment or ornament to the action is, therefore, comparable to the music that will soon begin. And just as the plot was contrived for music, so must our adaptation travel to

its own advantage from the one day to the other.

Bright sunshine, therefore, floods the platforms. Every moment more trains are bringing visitors to Paris. They come in from every direction, after all-night journeys which began a moment or two ago in the wings, from foreign capitals, from watering places, Vichy, Trouville, Biarritz, or from a quiet day or two, incognito, in the country. By the exit, and waiting for an arrival, two young men, Bobinet and the Vicomte Raoul de Gardefeu, pace up and down in front of each other, strutting in an exaggerated manner like a pair of turkey cocks. They try to avoid each other's glances; and very soon it is apparent that they have come to the Gare St. Lazare in order to meet the same person. Nor are they silent, but talk rapidly in short, clipped phrases, pouring out their grievances. Nothing could be more characteristic than their dress. Gardefeu, who is the elder of the two, has the tall stove-pipe hat, the 'cylindre', pomaded hair, a monocle, a walking stick with a tassel, and wears the latest elegance of a short brown coat, trousers of the same and a fancy waistcoat. Gardefeu is the man of the world of forty, bien rusé, and deeply in debt. Bobinet, 'petit Bob', is very small and dapper, in a 'cylindre', of course, and wearing a short coat that is like an Eton jacket. He is the little, clipped poodle of the trottoir. Gardefeu has to hurry his steps in order to keep up with his strut and patter. His voice is high and shrill; and Gardefeu is the person who, in every instance, will be the successful lover. It is just this that has happened. This, indeed, is the trouble between them.

'Bobinet (à part). C'est M. Raoul de Gardefeu. Je ne le salue pas, parcequ'il m'a joué un tour.

Gardefeu (à part). C'est le petit Bobinet. Il ne me salue pas, parcequ'il nous est arrivé une aventure.

Bobinet. J'étais un peu plus que du dernier bien avec Blanche Taupier. Tout Paris sait que j'ai été un peu plus que du dernier bien avec Blanche Taupier.

Gardefeu. Blanche Taupier m'a aimé, comme elle sait aimer. . . . Tout Paris sait que Blanche Taupier m'a aimé.

Bobinet. Un matin Blanche Taupier et moi

demeurions alors tous les deux à Ville d'Avray. . . . . Blanche me dit: "Petit Bob, si nous invitions à dîner ton ami Gardefeu."

Gardefeu. Blanche était à Ville d'Avray: elle m'écrit, "Venez demain à une heure, il n'y sera pas; en sortant de chez vous, recommandez à votre domestique de dire que vous devez bientôt rentrer."

Bobinet. Je réponds: "Soit, invitons Gardefeu." Elle me dit: "Va le chercher à Paris, il est chez lui à une heure; ne reviens pas sans lui"... je pars.

Gardefeu. J'arrive à Ville d'Avray; je trouve Blanche; je ne trouve pas Bobinet; je lui dis: "Comment avez-vous fait pour l'éloigner?"

Bobinet. J'arrive chez Gardefeu . . . son domestique me dit: "Monsieur va rentrer à l'instant." Il était une heure; j'attends, deux heures arrivent, puis trois heures: j'attendais toujours. . . .

Gardefeu. Blanche me répond: "J'ai pris un moyen très simple... j'ai dit au petit Bob d'aller vous chercher à Paris, et de ne pas revenir sans vous."

Bobinet. Enfin, à quatre heures, je me décide à

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m'en aller tout seul, je retourne à Ville d'Avray, et je le trouve installé.

Gardefeu. Vers cinq heures il est revenu; je lui ai dis, "Tiens, pendant que tu étais chez moi, j'étais chez toi; c'est très drôle!"

Bobinet. Je ne l'ai pas trouvé drôle.

Gardefeu et Bobinet (ensemble). Et voilà pourquoi nous ne nous saluons pas.

L'Employé. Le train de Rambouillet, messieurs, le train de Rambouillet!'

At once the platform fills with passengers. It is now that the air becomes magical and charged with meaning. And, in a moment, the music will begin.

Métella comes walking past. She has been in the country with Gontran, her lover, no further than Fontainebleau or Chantilly—or was it Rambouillet?—summer names like bands playing under the trees, like drives in the forest, a picnic, a 'Robinson', or a trip upon the river. She is twenty-five years old, with short fair hair quite different from the fashion, a little hat, a pillbox hat not covering her curls, a black close-fitting bodice and a rose pink crinoline, not bell-shaped, but straight and of the rigid sort, with

simple lines like seams of the same black in it. In one hand she holds her green parasol. Her walk has great attraction and you can see the curious points of her boots, black kid boots they might be, and that she wears white stockings.

But Métella, leaning on the arm of Gontran, passes them by. She ignores both Gardefeu and Bobinet, though they have come to Gare St. Lazare to meet her. 'Connais pas!' is all she will say as they step forward; and then, when safely past them, she turns and smiles. But it is too late. It has this effect, though, that their quarrel turns into reconciliation. They quarrelled over Blanche Taupier and, now, become reconciled when Métella pretends not to know them.

After this, the plot can unfold itself without interruption. The Chœur des Voyageurs starts off with the speed that only Offenbach can communicate to a chorus. Its rhythm is made out of the name of every nationality that comes to Paris and from the name of every station on the line. It quickens and quickens its pace until, at a turn, the orchestra begins the breathless and headlong tune to which its preliminary speed has been but the prelude. This is long and open

and comes to the clension or gathering up of its ends when the brass instruments rally, as it were, and with short and stabbing blasts bring back the verse, sung, now, like a strophe, antiphonally, or to right hand and to left, in reserve of breath, till the chorus comes back again, more headlong than before, and the music ends like the conclusion of a dance in a coda of short, separated notes.

This Chœur des Voyageurs is, perhaps, the quickest and most brilliant of Offenbach's choruses. We write this, moreover, in full knowledge of many others and, not least, the wonderful military and concerted finales of La Fille du Tambour Major, written in 1879 just before Offenbach died; written, in fact, when his hand was cramped in agony from gout, and achieving in this finale to the last creation of his comic genius, a sort of apotheosis or return to pride of the French military spirit which pervades Offenbach, as it does Berlioz, or, indeed, most other patriotic Frenchmen of the Second Empire. Into this finale the Chant du Départ is introduced with most thrilling effect; but we must return to the Chœur des Voyageurs with

no more than this mere allusion to that opera of Vivandières, of Zouaves, of Spahis, of Chasseurs, Cuirassiers, Tirailleurs, Grenadiers, a comic opera, in fact, which calls out for a splendid revival.

The first hearing, then, of this Chœur des Voyageurs is an experience that no one who loves music will forget. It is Offenbach at the height of his comic genius. But nothing in the world can be wholly original. Its superlative speed and dash are derived from Rossini, who, in his turn, was based as to this side of his genius upon the old Neapolitan school of opera buffa. Offenbach is, in this respect, the last flowering of that tradition. It was founded upon the quick inflections, the lightning moods of the Roman or Neapolitan crowds. Mozart, in the Nozze di Figaro, neither achieves, nor seeks for, such street effects. It was Rossini, deriving from the school of Naples, who excelled in this direction. The opening chorus in the Barbiere, where the linkmen dispute for their tips with Count Almaviva, is an instance of this. But those persons who took the opportunity, three years ago, when l'Italiana in Algeri was revived

for Mme. Supervia, at Covent Garden, will have heard the finale to the first act of this comedy. It is, indeed, the best thing in all that opera which, from that moment, declines in inspiration, until, in the end, the plot becomes quite unintelligible and this piece which opens in such brilliance and sparkle finishes, in fact, not far from bathos. Nothing, though, could equal the speed and brio of this finale. It is as original in conception as any finale to a Haydn symphony; but with character and demonstrable purpose, or meaning, added to its speed and patter. Nothing, in this miracle of lightness, is inappropriate or unintelligible in sentiment. It would seem, from this finale, as if the coming act must be one of the wonders of music; but the genius of Rossini stops short of this and finds its limits in this final chorus to the first act. Half a century, and more, separates l'Italiana in Algeri from La Vie Parisienne and, perhaps, any convention or tradition must have that lapse of time in which to work if it is to exploit its possibilities to their full advantage. During that interval of fifty years it would be invidious to mention Donizetti, in his Don Pasquale, a comic opera which has more poetry, more beauty of phrase, than Rossini ever aspired to; and there are, as well, in minor excellence, the operas of Auber, Fra Diavolo, for example, but the culmination of Rossini in his comic genius is surely, as we have said, to be discovered in Offenbach. No one, now that another sixty years have elapsed, has the correct art of singing this music; nor is it possible, or even conceivable, to translate Meilhac and Halévy, his librettists, into any true resemblance to their original. It is to be remembered that his contemporaries found the serious, or lyrical side of Rossini fully equal to his comic genius. He was, to them, the master of all styles, serious and comic. The opera buffa was only a half, if that, of his genius. But Offenbach, with the assistance of his incomparable librettists, Meilhac and Halévy, concentrated his energies upon the comic side alone. Rossini, who seldom, if ever, found a good book to set was scarcely ever upheld in his inspiration by librettists who could make for him the opportunities in which he excelled. But the collaboration of Offenbach and his two inveterate assistants was able to

produce success after success in ease and assurance. This is not to suggest that the genius of Offenbach, for a genius he was within his limits, is ever of the first order; but Offenbach is one of those lesser men, a Chabrier, a Johann Strauss, a Rossini, in fact, through whom more frequent delight is to be obtained than from their more austere betters. And, of this, there could be no more conspicuous truth than in the case of La Vie Parisienne.

We have, indeed, in another moment, as the plot proceeds, the entry of the Brazilian. This decidedly 'rasta' personage, who has arrived this moment, by this train, in Paris, with his pockets full of gold to spend, is preceded by an elaborate orchestral introduction, or comment, à la Figaro in the *Barbiere*, which surpasses the 'Largo al Factotum', that song with which Figaro comes upon the scene, in fantastic or personal effectiveness. It has set out to compete with Figaro's song; and it excels it. A moment later we have the unfolding of the whole plot with the arrival of the Baron de Gondremarck. He has come from his native Sweden bringing with him his young wife, the Baroness,

and also a letter of introduction in his pocket addressed to Métella, whom he is most anxious to meet. This is the opportunity for which Gardefeu has been waiting and no sooner has he set eyes on the Baroness than he offers himself as guide to the Baron and his wife during their stay in Paris. He takes them quickly to his own flat or apartment which he indicates to them as the Grand Hotel, that new hotel on the Boulevard des Italiens, at which they had reserved rooms. They see through this deception; but Gardefeu promised to effect that introduction to Métella; and, as for the Baroness, she is more than content to have Gardefeu for her guide while her husband attends to the many business matters which have brought him to Paris. In the meantime, before they leave us, and while we are still at the Gare St. Lazare, we have a trio of Gardefeu and the Baron and Baroness upon the attractions of Paris.

Her words are:

Je veux, moi, dans la capitale Voir les divas qui font fureur: Voir la Patti dans Don Pasquale, Et Teresa dans Le Sapeur. The lines that we have quoted convey, in the space of a breath, the whole glitter of the contemporary scene. But, now, the act ends with another chorus, a finale, of frenzied gaiety: "Tous les étrangers vers toi s'élancent, Paris!' and the curtain falls.

We will, now, descend into this double or multiple world, of which we have the temporary liberty, while it lasts. We go, in fact, from the stage into the audience. This first night has attracted to itself a public that is as varied and cosmopolitan as those figures we have left. In the stalls and boxes are sitting the Duc de Mouchy, Prince Murat, Khalil-bey, the Duke of Hamilton, Pietri, the Dukes of Sagan, Richelieu, Cossé-Brissac, the brothers Ezpeleta, Prince Troubetzkoi, Emile Augier, de Gontaut-Biron, Vacquerie, Daru, Narischkine, the Marquis de Caux, Nigra, Camille Doucet, etc., etc., . . . and Cora Pearl, Leonide Leblanc, Silly, Anna Deslions, Leontine Massin, Caroline Letessier, Giulia Barucci, Constance Rézuche, Lucile Mangin, Marguerite Bellangé, Adèle Courtois, and others.1 The import of these names comes

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> This audience, with the exception of Cora Pearl, was present at the first performance of *Orphée aux Enfers* by

from their association, in turn, but omitting those that are less interesting, with the marriage of the first named Duc de Mouchy with Princess Anna Murat, great niece of Napoleon I, a wedding that took place less than a year before this, while Princess Anna Murat survived until 1924 to be mentioned by Marcel Proust; with her father, Prince Murat, the son of King Joachim and Caroline the sister of Napoleon, who was born at Naples in 1801, while his father was King, and was brought up there, who emigrated to America, after Waterloo, and was postmaster for many years at Tallaharsee, in Florida, who married a great niece of Washington and, returning to Paris after the coup d'étât, was recognized by Napoleon III as of imperial blood, had his debts of two million francs paid, was granted a generous allowance from the civil list and, surviving the fall of the Empire, died in 1878, being the father of the

Offenbach, Meilhac and Halévy, given in the following year, 1867, at the Bouffes-Parisiennes, cf. Offenbach, by Louis Schneider, Paris, 1923, p. 137. They had come to see Cora Pearl as Cupid on the stage. This public we have repeated for the present occasion, excepting that we have placed Cora Pearl among the audience.

Duchesse de Mouchy, just mentioned; in the case of Khalil-bey with the extravagances of the Egyptian Khedives, the shuttered berlins and daumonts in which the ladies of the harem drove through the streets of Cairo, the opera house with boxes guarded by gilded lattices and a posse of black eunuchs, while music of Verdi was played to the orders of the Khedive Ismail; with the Duke of Hamilton, grandson of William Beckford, son of Princess Marie of Baden and cousin, therefore, of Napoloen III, for whom Napoleon had, in 1865, in the year previous to this night, restored the Dukedom of Chatelheraut granted to his ancestor, who was guardian to Mary, Queen of Scots, by Henri II, in 1548, this young man with the auburn curls, and florid face being a prodigious rake, the patron of the Café Riche and the Maison Dorée and host at supper parties beyond number given for the ladies of whom we have written the names in midst of this paragraph; then there is Pietri, an Italian cousin of the Emperor; the Duc de Sagan, descendant of Talleyrand, inheritor of a principality in Prussia through his mother the Princess Dorothea, the

last of the family of Biron, Princes of Courland, Semigalle and Sagan, who had their origin through the favours of the Empress Elizabeth of Russia; the Duc de Richelieu, descended from the sister of the Cardinal, a youth of twenty, kinsman to that émigré duc de Richelieu who founded Odessa and was the ablest man in the Russia of Alexander I, kinsman, also, to the Duc de Richelieu, who, born in 1696, was a page to Louis XIV, and two years before his death, in 1788, married a girl of fourteen that she might have a state pension as his widow, this woman, in her turn, living to be so old that she was presented to Napoleon III and Eugénie at the Tuileries, while her relation, the young man whom we are discussing, married a niece of the poet Heine, who was known personally to the writer; the brothers Ezpeleta, of whom we know nothing, though their name, which must be Basque, suggests the silver mines or ranches of Mexico or the Argentine; Cossé-Brissac, Troubetzkoi, de Gontaut-Biron, Narischkine, the Marquis de Caux, husband of Adelina Patti, names which evoke faded elegancies, shadows of the 'cylindre', the stove-

pipe hat, curious details of their shoes, so different from ours, their opera cloaks, their glasses, their ties and waistcoats, their carriages waiting for them till the play was ended, their bedrooms, their nightwear, our curiosity as to all these things being aroused as we watch them in the theatre, or in the foyer during the interval, persons who because they are just so far removed from us in time, where our grandparents could touch their hands, are further from our reach or knowledge than the figures in more distant centuries. Also, these men are in the near pattern of ourselves, they travelled by steamer and by railway; their clothes are but little different; they are even so near to us that we could see the family resemblance between them and their descendants; and could, in fact, by searching our memories, think of some person to mention to them whom we knew and whom they would remember. Talking in this trivial interval between two acts of the play, none of these persons, had we this gift of immortality in our possession, would have the seriousness to listen, it might be. And yet, if drawn aside and convinced by some proof or

token, what is there that anyone in this thronged hall or foyer would not want to know! Not alone the fortunes of his own descendants, but news of his friends and loves, how their end came, and news of the living; what time it was; —not, as looking at a clock or watch, but as though finding an old newspaper in a drawer and searching, at once, through its headlines for its date, as though this person, or any and all of them, knew beyond the futility of the moment and that our interruption came only from a further halt or station in time and not from the ends of it, where we find the truth.

The thought of such a mission as this gives a curious thrill or tingling to the skin. All these persons who are whiling away this interval, talking till the next act begins, are in our power, to be told their fate. Not that their characters are pleasant. There is hardly a person here whom we would choose for a friend. They are the 'hommes du monde'; and their only appeal to our interest lies in their elegances and their associations. Those who could recognize Leonide Leblanc, Silly, Anna Deslions, Leontine Massin, Caroline Letessier, Giulia Barucci,

Constance Rézuche, Lucile Mangin, Marguerite Bellangé, Adèle Courtois, while they were sitting in the stalls or boxes would know them, here, in the interval. The hetairae of the Empire were of a type to themselves as can be seen in the unflattering photographs which are all that is left of them. It is, even, an extraordinary thought to consider the hopeless search that we might make for their graves. These women, who were so well known in their time, are not to be discovered in death. Many of them would be buried under their real names: others, retiring in poverty or riches from the scene, would take another name and die in it. And not only their deaths are interesting, in this sense; but, also, the start of their careers: the first betrayal, and how soon another followed on it. But the beginnings and ends to so many lives of pleasure must not interrupt this heyday or flowering of their beauty. And it is in the women that we see the difference. Their dress is as elaborately improbable as in any print, by Utamaro, of the 'green mansions'. The crinoline, which had gone out of fashion with the Empress Eugénie and her Court, two years before this, in 1864,

was still worn in greater fantasy than ever by demi-mondaines. This gave them a hieratic distinction and made them, as, indeed they were, the priestesses of a cult to be known, at once, by this insignia. Perhaps, under this general listing of their names, we may allow imagination to play upon their diversity of attractions. Leonide Leblanc and Leontine Massin, for instance, two names which, together, have a distinct and travestied echo in our ears, in parody of a great choregraph of our time, these, in their names of Leonide and Leontine, must represent the maturity of that visual moment. In

<sup>1</sup> These names, so typical of their time, are to be compared with those of their equivalents, a decade later, after the fall of the Empire. For the hundredth performance of La Fille du Tambour Major a supper party was given by Offenbach, on 7th March, 1880, at the Hotel Continental. The guests included, as well as the actresses of the piece, Rose Thé, Humann, Humberta, Bade, Bertha Legrand, Becker, Rivero, Ghinassi, Lavigne and also, it is only fair to add, Leonide Leblanc, by then somewhat of a veteran. With her exception, these are the names of a new period tending towards the age of Toulouse-Lautrec. After the supper an orchestra played a quadrille on motifs from Offenbach's operas, but he was too ill and feeble to recognize all the tunes. He had written more than a hundred operas and operettas. Offenbach died a few months later, on 4th October,

their persons they are that epoch and none other. They must be seen in red velvet mantles trimmed with black lace, in black tulle dresses with gold lace, in caracos of red satin studded with gigantic steel buttons, or hung with cut glass, or wearing the Diana bodice which left one shoulder uncovered. They are to be thought of, naked, as the Olympia of Manet; but with figures pinched in by their corsets, and little, or Celestial feet as if still wearing the boots of black kid which were the fashion. And their bodies, according to the same convention which makes a dancer in the wings much smaller than her height upon the boards, are little and puny taken out of the great cages of the crinoline. Giulia Barucci, an Italian, is the contadina of the vineyard, but a blonde Italian; Adèle Courtois, another name of the day, not beautiful, but dressed as no one else could dress; Anna Deslions, famous for her figure;

1880. Les Contes d'Hoffmann was produced after his death, 10th February, 1881. La Goulue, Jane Avril, Nini patte en l'air, were the favourites of the fin de siécle, the period of Toulouse-Lautrec and of Beardsley. They are removed by two generations from Leonide Leblanc and Leontine Massin.

Marguerite Bellangé, to whom the Emperor drove, in a closed berlin, passing the afternoons of a year or two ago with this languid, or Creole beauty; Silly, a shape of fantasy or artificiality, a griffon bruxellois, so small as hardly to be considered, but with every artifice of veil and parasol, a drive with whom in her carriage through the Bois must have had the poetry of l'Escarpolette of Fragonard; and, most famous of all, Emma Elizabeth Crouch, i.e. Cora Pearl.

This daughter of a wandering and drunken Irish musician, who wrote one beautiful song, Kathleen Mavourneen, could never learn to speak French correctly. Her Cockney accent was her charm. She has a round face, a skin of dazzling innocence, and matchless teeth. Her hair is blonde and cut like a little girl's. When she opens her mouth she may say anything under the sun and is completely and absolutely shameless. Her appearance of a virginity which is too good to be true, which has been trained in every viciousness, but the final and essential one, until the last moment, which is to be the prerogative of every fresh lover that she takes, this is her fascination. A depraved and arrested

childhood, which has still preserved its youthful health and high spirits, has been the means by which she has grown rich. She has a luxurious house hung with silks and tapestries, an onyx bath, and the finest horses and carriages in Paris. Her pointed naïveté in all her dealings disconcerts and conquers men. She is twentythree years old, with nearly ten years experience behind her. Cora Pearl may have appeared as English to her French or cosmopolitan lovers, but we have no evidence as to the impression she produced upon an Englishman. To our ears it is probable that she would have lost her nationality without assuming another, as if, in our day, she had lived for a long time in Hollywood. She spoke French, as we have said, with an atrocious intonation, while her English was a little in front of, or behind, her understanding, being no longer her second nature but something, once learned, and now forgotten. Since the age of fourteen, according to her memoirs, which are not necessarily apochryphal, she had earned her living. Before she was twenty she had become established on the scale in which we now find her. The diamonds upon her neck

and wrists are in proof of this. She seems to shed forth an aura or glamour of dissipation, like that given out—and there is no doubt of this—by Gaby Delys. It is, in part, physical but, also, she has a quality which makes her the centre of attention. Her career is neither entirely her own fault, nor that of her pursuers. She was created for this purpose, and to this end. It is as if she were intended for it, as others are impelled, in spite of every obstacle, to act, or to play the violin. The decrees of providence have set her apart and given to her, in so doing, an evil radiance which is only in variation upon the talents bestowed on others. It is probable that the Duke of Hamilton, perhaps accompanied by a friend or the trainer of his racehorses, were the only Englishmen in this audience, but Cora Pearl, who may have been born in either Dublin or Exeter, will have spoken to them, if speak she did, in the same atrocious French in which she talked to all comers. In public, here in the foyer, as well as in private, she was surrounded by a circle. We were told, only a few days before writing this, of an old gentleman who, were he alive now, would be

about ninety years old. He used to describe how, one Sunday morning, Prince Paul Murat called and said he would take him and his little brother for a walk in the Bois. When they had started he said the Bois was not very interesting and he would take them to see a friend of his instead. So, in their sailor suits, gloves, sticks and 'melons' (bowler hats) they called at a large house and were shown into a salon, where Cora Pearl was lying on a sofa, the focus of a hemicycle of diplomatists, senators and academicians, all seated with their chins leaning on gold knobbed walking sticks, their yellow gloves placed in the 'cylindres' at their sides, upon the floor. The Prince presented his 'jeunes amis', M. Alfred L. and M. Alphonse L. and they joined the hemicycle. When they returned home their mother asked if the Bois had been nice and whether they had seen any animals, to which their reply was 'Mais non, Maman, beaucoup plus que ça: une femme toute nue!' This story, which could only be true of the period in which it occurred, for, if young children had been offered similar adventures in the time, say, of Louis XV, the nude woman might be lying on

the couch but there would not be the hemicycle of diplomatists, senators and academicians, gives us the apotheosis of the Empire. It is the painted ceiling of that gilded time. Heavy draperies, the velvet curtains of Garnier's Opéra, descend from the cornice. This naked goddess, and it is necessary to think once more of the Olympia of Manet, has the curves and contours which present taste does not admire. She is sunning herself, like a lioness, and is silent and impels silence on those around her. This is not the nudity, as now, of an outward and athletic body, nor the nudities of Tiepolo or Boucher who could ride without restraint upon the clouds. Instead, it is a secret thing to be unveiled, unwrapped. When it is finished, like the lioness who has performed her trick, the silence ends. Her maid brings in her light and silken underclothes. It is the beginning for the hoop or crinoline. Every hand reaches for its 'cylindre', and the morning's done. We can think of this as we see her, now, surrounded, as ever, by men who wear their top hats, their 'cylindres', in this interval and are as difficult, indeed, to separate from their stove-pipe hats as

the Chinaman fron his pigtail, or the Bedouin from his beard. And now, in its turn, this interval is ending. The theatre attendants announce the dying gaslights and the raising of the curtain.

When there is so much to claim the attention. alike on the stage and in the audience, it is no longer necessary to follow every detail of the action. Often before it has been with a wrench, a breaking or rupture of reality, that the real world is left for the world of artifice. The first spoken words, when the curtain goes up, are ever a disillusionment. It is not so, or never to the same degree, if music is the medium between the true world and the false. But, already, the orchestra is playing. It is effecting this transition as we pass down the row of stalls to take our seats. We are being transposed into the world that we left so short a time ago. The Baron de Gondremarck, Gardefeu, Bobinet, and the strange figures, the 'fantoches' that surround them, become the reality that we are watching. At once, we are plunged into an intimacy with their actions.

The Baron and Baroness are settled comfortably in the apartment of Gardefeu, which it still pleases them to pretend is the Grand Hotel. The Baroness, with Gardefeu, as her guide, has entered upon an orgy of shopping. Gloves, shoes and hats begin to arrive. There is a delightful duet, sung by the shop assistants who have come with their parcels. This introduces the character of Gabrielle, the gantière, to whom Offenbach has given music in foretaste of other lovely moments that are to come. It is at such times that Offenbach approaches near, again, to Rossini, as will be plain to those who remember the little song in the third act of the Barbiere which is sung by the old housekeeper. This is often omitted in performance; but it is a small masterpiece of melody and characterization. Only, there, it is an aged character who is portrayed: here, it is a young girl and her song is tender and gay; in fact, it is her personality and appearance, even when the music is heard alone and without her. This is a true case of portraiture in music. Her air is the portrait of her; and this is a faculty which has been given to but few composers of music.

But this beautiful air, thrown so liberally to the audience, and then forgotten, is followed, in a moment or two, by the famous duo of the Baron and Gardefeu, a duo which has been cast in the form of a bolero. Its theme is the Baron's letter of introduction to Métella: 'Portez la lettre á Métella.' The Baron sings of his austere upbringing in Sweden, and the coda or quickening of the verse comes with the mention of Métella: 'Je veux m'en fourrer, fourrer jusquelà.' There is nothing Spanish in this bolero, unless it is a sort of fantasy of elaboration, a note of melancholy turning into the delights of expectation. This is, indeed, that part of this comic opera which is most full of inspiration, not the frenzied dances and drinking songs of the orgy which is to come. Here, there is song after song which is an independent creation, a poetical entity, living within the bounds of its own imaginative existence and, if torn from its context, still surviving as the comment of a great satirist upon the peculiar times in which he lived and, also, as a work of art in itself. Such is the song of the Colonel's widow, sung by Gabrielle, an absurdity of a really high order of

invention and a tribute, in this, to the intelligence and quickness of wit of its audience. No public of fools could appreciate this.

But there are better things to come. For now we have the 'Couplets de la Parisienne', sung by Gabrielle. The talents of Offenbach, at their most copious and fecund, had that felicity of melody leading into melody which is characteristic of Mozart. Also, the mere physical length of his harmonic genius is a thing remarkable by itself. Nowhere is this more manifest than in the 'Couplets de la Parisienne'. The verse, which is a caricature, but an affectionate one, of feminine conceits and foibles, dressing, shopping, promenading, then turns into an extraordinary picture of the times. It gives us the noise and movement of the crinoline as they are portrayed nowhere else in art. And, not only that, but why the crinoline was worn, what its charm was in the eyes of those who wore it, how it felt to wear a crinoline, in what lay the fascination that could be achieved by it, all expressed in the foaming, bustling, trembling advance of it, in the progress of the tune, going forward by little rapid steps with the tap tap-

ping of her shoes upon the pavement. If the 'Couplets de la Parisienne' were described as having the elegance and fragility of a figure of Chelsea or Meissen porcelain it would give only a part of the quality of this song. A Meissen figure is a china marionette; but with only one pose or movement, fixed until the figure is broken. It is a dancer in the end or attitude of her dance. But, here, it is the figure in movement, a living body, and the only work of art in which the crinoline of the 'sixties is really portrayed. That it should possess those qualities that have been named is thrown into the isolation that it deserves when we think of the typical things of that period, of the brassy coils of Meyerbeer, an orchestration like a great chandelier in blaze, the marble and gilt and ormolu of the opera house of Garnier; or, nearer home, the Ruskinian Gothic that was to give us the black and yellow Natural History Museum, South Kensington, or the red brick of Keble College, Oxford. The 'Couplets de la Parisienne' is a song that, in silence and when it is not heard, stands under a glass shade. When that is lifted from it, the figure comes to life.

Trembling its flounces, the cage or crinoline comes on. Nothing so artificial has ever been imagined. And the sound of it creates the person who is in this cage. It is what is hidden, so elaborately hidden, that is the fascination of the crinoline. We hear the tap tapping of her black kid boots; and, since this gives her no ankles, must think of her white stockings, the flashing white stems of them seen once in a dozen paces, and hope for a tilting of her crinoline. For it can lift like the glass shade itself. Then we shall see her twin knees against the rills or foamings of that huge white shell, the living thing hidden in the crinoline.

The beauties of La Vie Parisienne, such as this song that we have described, exist, side by side, with the grotesques or 'fantoches' of the piece. These are conceived of in a vein of invention to which the only parallel is in the caricature statues of Dantan. One or two of these, that, for instance, of Paganini, are familiar to most people; but a glance through the Musée Dantan, a book of woodcuts in silhouette of admirable execution, depicting most of the figures carved by Dantan of which replicas were sold at

his studio, will reveal live characters who are the exact embodiment of the grotesques of Offenbach. In fact, this nearly forgotten sculptor, Jean Pierre Dantan (1800-1869), is the nearest equivalent to this aspect of Offenbach. Dantan, the inventor of this genre of caricature sculpture, exists in a solitude by himself, and is the only person who ever practised the art. And so it is with Offenbach; he has no parallel in music, where this line of grotesque invention is concerned. It begins, soon after the opening of the piece, with the song of the Brazilian and is, by this stage in the evening, well advanced upon its course. But the full play of his 'fantoches' does not come until the next act so that we leave our analysis of their effect until that moment comes.

In the meantime, we have that exquisite lyrical invention, the 'letter song' of Métella. This is the moment when she reads aloud the letter of introduction sent round to her by the Baron de Gondremarck. It is in the writing of Frascata, who was her lover last summer. It is tempting to quote a few lines of this beautiful thing; but we must be content with its opening words:

'Vous souvient-il, ma belle?': Such is the start of the 'letter song'.

The operatic cliché of reading aloud a love letter has nearly always, for some reason, an inspiring effect upon the composer. It is a convention like the serenade, or the music lesson. In fact, it is the serenade, not as sung, but in its reception by the person to whom it is addressed. Perhaps the letter song in the Nozze di Figaro is the most lovely thing in the whole of that opera! But, in intention, it is not quite the same as this song of Métella. Countess Almaviva is telling Susanna what to write down in the letter. The song, which is flawless in shape, has even the rhythm of someone saying aloud what is to be written down. But it is at least, and this is our purpose in the comparison, in the feminine and not the masculine psychology. It is, thus, that women think of their lovers: in a different mode therefore, from that of the serenade. So it is with the 'letter song' of Métella. The greatest artists, in their lyrical moments, possess this power of changing their sex. Shakespeare, in Antony and Cleopatra, would appear to be in love himself, with first the one and then the

other. This is the gift, also, of the great novelist. Where Madame Bovary is concerned, it is no longer Flaubert but this woman with whom he has completely identified himself, as we have evidence in the symptoms of poisoning that he developed, when writing of her death. The 'letter song' is, therefore, shall we say, in intention the opposite or passive to a serenade. But, here, in the song of Métella, we have first of all, in sentiment, the feelings and memories of Frascata, her lover of last summer, upon which is imposed the tender but only half-regretful mood of Métella, Gardefeu and Bobinet have occurred since then, if not before; there has been Gontran, on whose arm we saw her at the Gare St. Lazare; and, soon there will be Gondremarck. Métella cannot be expected, therefore, to feel sentimental about Frascata. At the same time she has pleasant memories of the summer they spent together; and the words of Frascata are certainly strong in sentiment; he is unhappy, as well, at being so far from Paris. The half-sentiment of a moment is often more moving than a burst of tears. It is genuine and felt; and is not hysterical or adolescent. So this

'letter song' is serious and considered. It is an instance in which Offenbach exhibits the extraordinary powers that were his. This composer of more than a hundred operettas could achieve moments, like the 'letter song', which have the purity, the clean jet of inspiration, of Mozart. This is no audacious comparison to anyone who knows enough Rossini to compare him with Mozart, and enough of Offenbach to think of him as close to the comic genius of Rossini. The Contes d'Hoffmann is in vindication of this coupling of their names. And it is more than probable that Mozart, himself, could we have seen it, would prefer this opera to a 'musicdrama' that lasts for four evenings and has never a light or lyrical moment.

At the same time, it is to be understood that we do not attribute to the composer any deliberate method by which he has reached the results that we have described. It is a matter of instinctive technique, like the processes by which poetry is written. No one can suppose that the choice, for instance, of vowel sounds in poetry is undertaken upon any principle but that of inspiration, that is to say, of subcon-

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scious creation. The writing of such music as the 'letter song' must very nearly correspond to the composition of a lyric in poetry. The time for discussion is after it is finished and not while it is being written.

This opera reaches its moment of beauty in the 'letter song' of Métella. The rondo fulfils its shape and, once again, there comes the introduction, the first few lines of the verse: 'Vous souvient-il, ma belle?'; and it is done. But, as a curtain to this act, we have the Tyrolienne of Gabrielle. This is in parody of a German waltz. It begins with a slow schühplatter dance, a mountain waltz meant for the stamping of heels. The entire company joins in this, and they sing words of an inspired silliness to which the music could not be more appropriate.

Then, always with Gabrielle to lead them, the tune becomes a yodelling song. This is orchestrated in masterly fashion so that, as a parody, it is really thrilling in effect. And it becomes frenzied at the end, where the waltz turns and turns like a great wheel in midst of the yodelling. The coda comes, with everyone

shouting 'Ohé, oha', and the orchestra spinning its circles to the fortissimo of every instrument. It has a pompous and almost military termination and then the curtain falls, falling, indeed, upon this brass band waltz of waltzes. The scene ends, in fact, upon a high pitch of fantasy. The châlet summerhouses are invoked, and the absurdities of the Tyrolese beer garden. It is a parody of diabolical force and adroitness; a humour, to which other humours of comic operas, before and since, are as the films of Walt Disney in colour compared to those that are in black and white. This parody of the Tyrolese mountains has every fire of colour. It is the most exciting and most absurd, curtain that could be imagined. The strains of that yodelling waltz linger in the ears. Nothing could be more appropriate to come before the orgy scene that will be played in a few minutes' time. Its sardonic strength is in anticipation, as it were, to this banqueting or orgy that is to follow.

And now, during this interval, let us come

out of the theatre into the street. We will treat this pause or rest like the relâche upon the stage. It will give us the day in Paris.

When we get into the air it is a fine morning in May or June. The play, you will remember, was in October; but its action was in the summer. The characters of the piece, and those men and women whom we have mentioned in the audience, are not the only persons to be met with. That would be to say that the world of the footlights was no more than a gigantic mirror reflecting the same figures. If that were so, we have been, in a sense, the audience of both bodies; and it is, once more, in the quality of witness that, bearing the time and date in mind, as though to set our watches, we walk out into the daylight.

Or it is the person who left London for Paris who has come back. For it is necessary to point that contrast. The morning air must have the smell of Paris. This is another mode of life. It is the Imperial capital in splendour.

From the Grand Hotel, where Gondremarck and the Baroness think themselves, or pretend, to be, we come out into the street; it is as easy as to leave the theatre, in the entr'acte, for a breath of air. And now we are ourselves, looking with curious eyes; and yet it is the authentic brilliance, of sunlight on the 'cylindre' and the crinoline. But the word 'cylindre' is to be disliked. It is the stove-pipe hat, the tall top hat of the Emperor, worn by all classes, and in symbol, to ourselves, of the age of smoke, of the chimney and the funnel. The buildings of the capital are the same: it is the persons who are different. And not only the persons, but every detail of their lives.

We first see it in a barber's shop. This has wax busts, immaculately suave. There are weeping whiskers, falling in two drifts below the ears; the Dundreary, but redeemed and made Parisian; and the Imperial, beeswaxed to a point and with pointed moustachios, so exaggerated that they might be the antennae of an insect. The chief part of a hairdresser's work, moreover, lay in the making of wigs and toupés. No one would admit to baldness. Perhaps the daily life of a fashionable hairdresser would give us a characteristic picture of the time. His clients were not only the 'hommes du

monde' of the boulevard; but, also, we should go with him into the ugly houses of the day, the newer and richer the more ugly, where hair was curled or wigs tied on before the mirror, catching in this manner a hundred details of those lives that are lost to us. For who is there to tell us of these things! Even any one of those men mentioned in the theatre, at the moment of his leaving his house or apartment for the play, would be standing in the doorway about to step into his carriage, and the exaggerated height of him, wearing the inevitable tall hat, is as distant from us, though so near in time, as the mitred priest in a temple of Isis or Osiris. The moment has gone, and it will never come again.

But now we are at the Tuileries, named like the shining of light upon tiled roofs and turrets. It has lately been joined by the Emperor to the Louvre and stretches its over-loaded fronts into eternity. Within, it is said to be dark and uncomfortable, with long corridors, windowless and lit by lamps. The decoration is in official styles and without interest. But it is out of this mingling of all the worst tastes that Napoleon III and Eugénie come forth into that world of

silks and silk hats, of crinolines and carriages, that is our present interest. And the Cent Gardes à Cheval, at least, are of this time and none other. As their name implies, they form a squadron of a hundred men, drawn from the cavalry regiments. They are quartered at 37, rue de Bellechasse, in a building which had been a convent and now (1937) belongs to the Ministry of War. In this house their Colonel had an apartment which he seldom used, and the unmarried officers had their quarters which were furnished from the garde-meuble. Their mess was a big room decorated in white and gold, where they were served on silver plate by a maître d'hôtel and servants in livery. Every morning, a maréchal des logis, two brigadiers and a dozen men, under the command of an officer, went on guard at the Tuileries. Until 1858, an officer of the Cent Gardes slept at night outside the door of the Emperor's bedroom. Their full dress uniform consisted of a sky-blue tunic with red and gold epaulettes, white breeches, high boots, a breastplate, and the helmet designed by Eugène Lami, with a white horsetail and a red plume. The Cent Gardes only rendered military honours to the Emperor, the Empress, the Prince Imperial and foreign royalties. During the State Balls at the Tuileries, a Cent Garde stood motionless, like a statue, on every step of the great staircase. This immobility was, indeed, the subject of many jokes and much bewilderment. They were chosen specially for their great height belonging in this, as it were, to an extinct kind of Frenchman. Most of them wore the imperial and the great moustaches of the Emperor and were gigantic effigies, therefore, of the deity in little.

It might be said that no palace, of whatever architecture, is to be considered in the true picture of itself without a mention of the uniforms that brightened its doorways. But, in the case of the Cent Gardes, this is of more than usual importance. The Tuileries has gone, and the Cent Gardes have gone with it. They were the corps d'élite of the revived Imperial Guard. In this respect they were one of the sights of the capital. The Baron de Gondremarck, in that legendary North from which he came, from the remote province, it is likely of Dalecarlia, will

have heard of the Cent Gardes and have gone to watch them, on his first day in Paris, as they mounted guard. I remember, myself, long accounts of them from my old tutor, and his remark that their absence from Paris, after the siege of 1870, and the destruction of the Tuileries, left it no longer a capital.

But the Place du Carrousel, the interior square formed by the Tuileries and the Louvre, was the scene of the military reviews of the Empire. This custom had been inaugurated by the great Napoleon. It was in the Place du Carrousel that he reviewed the Old Guard who, in order to take up their positions in the square, had to march under the triumphal arch of Percier and Fontaine, which was then surmounted by the bronze horses of St. Mark's. These horses, which had formerly adorned the triumphal arches of Nero and of Trajan, in Rome, and were, then, taken by Constantine to decorate his new capital, whence, after a thousand years they were removed to Venice by Doge Enrico Dandolo, had been brought to Paris by Napoleon. They were returned to Venice after Waterloo. Their place above the Arc du Carrousel was occupied by a poor copy; but, in other respects, since the joining of the Tuileries to the Louvre, this centre of the capital had a more splendid effect under Napoleon III than in the time of Napoleon I. A review of the Imperial Guard under Napoleon III, with the veterans of the First Empire grouped round him, had the most imposing effect. It was the sort of military occasion for which music should have been commissioned from Berlioz. This was not done: but, at least, the military music that Berlioz had heard in his childhood, half a century before, under the great Napoleon, sounded forth again from the massed bands. The Chant du Départ was to be heard, and that fanfare with which the Emperor appeared to his troops. It is described by Balzac, who, also, remembered it. 'A son aspect, les tambours battirent aux champs, et les musiques débutèrent par une phrase dont l'expression guerrière deploya tous les instruments, depuis la grosse caisse jusqu'à la plus douce des flûtes. A leurs sons belliqueux les âmes tressaillirent, les drapeaux saluèrent, les soldats portèrent les armes par un mouvement unanime et régulier; des

mots de commandement se répétèrent comme des échos, et des cris de vive l'Empereur furent poussés par la multitude enthousiasmée . . . l'Empereur resta immobile sur son cheval. . . . Aucun trait de son visage ne s'émut.' These scenes, if they lacked the imperishable glamour of their original had, now, even increased in military splendour. It would be a delight to us to attempt some description of the Imperial Guard, as they appeared under Napoleon III, in the period at which military uniforms attained to their most far-reaching lengths of inappropriate fantasy. No fewer than thirty-three battalions of infantry and thirty-seven squadrons of cavalry, a total of some forty thousand men, were comprised in the Imperial Guard. But we must be content with no more than a mention of the Cuirassiers of the Guard, the Hussars, the Grenadiers, bearded and aproned, and the Zouaves. These last will be remembered shorn of their splendour, but still dressed in their baggy red trousers and armed with their excessively long and thin bayonets, bayonets, if I remember rightly, that were three sided and like a long skewer—before the War. They were

the ordinary Zouaves of the line; their equivalent in the Imperial Guard were that much more ornate and fantastic in finish; brave men, who perished nearly to a man in the fearful war of 1870.

But, if this masculine side of sartorial fantasy is insisted upon, however lightly, its equivalent in feminine vanity was of a variety that defies description. This is to be seen in any fashion plate of the period; while the better ones, such as those drawn by Compte Calix for Les Modes Parisiennes, or those of Jules David in Le Moniteur de la Mode, form an extraordinary panorama, or a promenade, as it were, by the side of romantic summerhouses; at the foot of the cliffs, near the bathing machines which a horse is dragging into the shallows; under the sides of the mountains, close to a village of Savoyard châlets; in an ivied arbour whence the turrets of the château can be seen; in a church, at the première baptême; or in a box at the opera, where the attention of all is turned in our direction and the lorgnette is in universal use. Such are the fashion plates; seldom justified, perhaps, in actual fact, but presenting the possibilities, at least, in their most attractive aspect. There is a whole repertory of poetry, even, an 'Elegy of Dead Fashion', composed out of the names of the materials employed, 'Blue Louise, gris bois, grenate, myrtle green', to quote one line from this enchanted past. But that world, indeed, is of a richness of imagination that is incredible. Nothing more far fetched or remote from reality has ever been created into fact than these fashion plates that are still to be bought for a few pennies on the book-stalls. And the truth or interpretation of these visions is to be seen in the paintings, by Boudin, of the Empress Eugénie on the sands of Trouville. Her hooped red crinoline is wider than those worn by her ladies and is looped up from the ground to show the black boots, the black kid boots of the 'sixties. It is as if Eugénie in her magenta crinoline is going to dig upon the sands. But, as well, we have a description of her on the sands at Biarritz, only a few miles from her native Spain, an account by a malevolent diplomat who pretended that he mistook Eugénie and her ladies for a group of the wives or mistresses of some Spanish matadors on their way to a fight at

Bayonne, the point of his pretence being their scarlet crinolines and the crimson paint upon their faces.

To return to Trouville, there is more than one painting by Boudin of this subject. Sometimes the Empress and her ladies are looking out to sea, in what must have been an exquisite ennui for, at Trouville, there was nothing, absolutely nothing to do. The ladies were, as it were, imprisoned in the sea air by the caprice of their mistress. They hold parasols over their heads; or are armed with long, thin walking sticks. In another picture, the group comes drifting towards us over the sands. They appear to be floating in their short, or country crinolines and are walking far out at the margin of the sea. We wonder, bird-like, what footmarks they will leave upon the wet sands. And their crinolines, seen against that emptiness of sea and sky, have the sharp unexpectedness of an image in Rimbaud's Les Illuminations. But the genius of Rimbaud was too impatient to dwell for long in a world of fabulous elegance. His poetry has only the hint of this and no more. Perhaps that world lay in wait for a wandering

and feminine touch to seek out its colours again and give them life.

It is tempting to dwell for a little longer among these elegancies of Compte Calix, or of Jules David, who are always drawn, two together, in a pair. White doves are ever in a pair, and so too, are the milkwhite oxen of Tuscany, working among the vines, by the banks of blue iris. Their dual presence gives these elegantes a sort of virginity of reputation and, also, allows an echo of their conversation to reach our ears. The topic is fashionable intelligence. It is more easy, in the light of this, to enter after them into the shops that we read of in the monthly summary or causerie of Les Modes Parisiennes. We hear of dresses worn recently by the Duchesse de B. . . . —or, sometimes, such a person is actually named in full—at the opera, during a performance of Vespri Siciliani, or Bellini's Beatrice di Tenda. A moment later we are asked to look inside a coffer which les demoiselles Noël are sending to the Court of Russia. The demoiselles Noël are the fashionable shop for hats and bonnets. Or it is a consignment, also destined for the Russian Court, of the parures and garlands of artificial flowers made by Constantin, a famous artist in his line. With true Russian prodigality these orders are of the most expensive sort imaginable. The Grand Duchesses will wear these wreaths and garlands at the State Balls in the Winter Palace, where every supper table is built round an orange tree in fruit or blossom, where the mazurka is danced, and the uniforms of the Cossacks and Circassians transports this winter elysium to even greater distances than is the truth.

But, indeed, these parures and bonnets of Constantin and the demoiselles Noël are of the utmost elegance, as we can see them in Les Modes Parisiennes. Headdresses are composed of sheaves of gilded corn; there are purselike, openwork caps made of red and gold filigree; wreaths of white fuchsia for the hair; garlands of lilac, cananga and syringa, of white nympheas of heliotrope or geranium, even of the spikes and flowers of cactus. The drawings of these headdresses, delicately coloured by hand, are one of the delights of Les Modes Parisiennes. Their effect must have been beautiful on the hair and framing in the face. Also, the straw bonnets of

the time are inimitably drawn. Their yellow straw, the 'paille blonde', is bent into every form that a bonnet can take; or it floats out far and wide, with flopping brims, in summer parody of the peasants in the fields. And, always, the hand of Constantin has left his touch of virtuosity upon the curve of a feather, or the placing of a flower.

But, also, the taste of this person, of whom it would be interesting to have the portrait, for he was the prototype of so many things that are typical of the time, had an influence in the interior decoration of houses. We read, in the fashionable intelligence, of an immense ball given by Prince Napoleon at the Palais Royal. A huge buffet decorated with silver bowls, amphoras and cornucopias, was decorated with an arrangement, by the hand of Constantin, of Asiatic and tropical plants: 'These cactuses, nymphaeas, China roses, drew the sense of smell and even satisfied it. The flowers trembled under the lights of the chandeliers and seemed to yield up their souls; here the geranium and carnation breathed, and, here, the heliotrope. The women surrounded the buffet,

bending their lovely necks into the bouquets of flowers and seizing ices and sorbets with their beautiful and admirably gloved hands. It is with gloves as it is with shoes, they give distinction to the whole art of dress. Gloves, then, must be irreproachable, they must lie on the hands without a crease or wrinkle, they must show the fingernails, and the skin must be supple, glistening and perfumed. After long search it is only the old established house of Privat who can supply gloves that fulfil all these conditions. As to Constantin, there is no doubt that he has surpassed himself on this evening.' Such, in paraphrase, for its refinements of language are impossible to reproduce, is an account of a ball at which Princess Mathilde acted as hostess. Her dress, for we can translate no more, was 'une robe en tulle bobin à cinq volants, sur lesquels était brodée une guirlande d'épis de blé et de mignardises rouge du plus charmant effet. Un collier de cinq rangs de perles fines de la plus belle eau entourait le cou splendide et les blanches épaules de la Princesse. Sa coiffure (des demoiselles Noël) se composait de fleurs des champs mêlés d'épis et de mignardises.' Her

brother, Prince Napoléon, who was in the exact likeness of his famous uncle, only in the Mussolinian canon, moved about from group to group of the guests, parading his Roman profile. And there was present, as well, Comte Walewski, a natural son of Napoleon, being, were it possible, even more in the image of Caesar. This imperial likeness in many of the Bonaparte family is important enough to be noted. Napoleon III, who, it is to be argued, was not a Bonaparte at all, had his own distinctive appearance, which became the model of the Frenchman of the Second Empire. We have already seen it, reproduced to scale, in the Cent Gardes; and it was to be recognized in the baggy trousered Zouave, in the boulevardier and in the blue bloused workman. But, Napoleon III apart, there were many of the family and, especially, the branch of King Jerôme, whose features were in the classical or Caesarian mould. This was of the finest or Dantesque type of Italian and it is to be remembered, in connexion with this, that the Bonaparte family was of ancient and noble origin. Their resemblance, therefore, was to the Augustan line. An Italian dictator of our own

time, if he has this likeness, is more related from his peasant birth to a Caesar raised out of the legion or cohort to the purple. Their marble pallor, their green eyes and small, white hands were the distinguishing marks of the true Bonaparte. It is in this manner that we must think of them moving among the hothouse flowers so dear to the 'sixties. Princess Mathilde in her fivetiered crinoline with its design of ears of barley and with golden corn sheaves in her hair; and Prince Napoléon and Comte Walewski, the nephew and son of Napoleon, in the black tail coat and trousers that seem so remote from Austerlitz or Marengo, and yet, though in the image of our own, have the subtle changes, the archaisms, of three generations dead and gone.

While the waltzes of Waldteufel or Olivier Métra ring against the walls, this paradise of flowers, real and artificial, yields to us its identity in time. This was the epoch of petunia, of gloxinia and calceolaria. Every season saw new varieties, speckled, mottled, dappled, all shrill and violent in hue. They loved the flowers of Mexico or Borneo, to be grown in steam heat, under a Latin name that might have been the

name of a scent invented by a perfumer, or, more simply, the name given to any one of these crinolined women under the glittering chandeliers. The boldness of their extravagant conceptions found its counterpart in such names as oppoponax and mesembryanthemum, and in the uncompromising colours of the petals. The geranium or pelargonium was trained into its shrillest and most blatant tones. Paris, in this time, was renowned for the forcing of hothouse flowers and for stove plants; these latter, natives of Borneo and of the tropical jungles of the East Indies, plants with variegated leaves and names longer and more complicated than the dogmas of the Eastern Church. The descent of these principles from the Parisian gardeners and nurserymen of the Second Empire is still to be seen in the Corporation gardens of watering places, even in England. But the supreme example of this style is the 'tapis vert' of Montecarlo. This is in exact period sense with the façades of the Casino, with the decoration of the older rooms in the interior, and with Garnier's delightful little opera, or salle de théâtre. Only, in the gardens of the tapis vert, the palm

trees and the luxuriance of cactus and agave take an almost unfair advantage of the conditions. Nevertheless, the grass, grown blade by blade, and the flowers potted out and renewed every few days, make the perfect specimen of a garden of this sort.

Such is the application of its principles to the open air; but, indoors, not in the salons of the Palais Royal, but in private apartments and modest rooms we would find its equivalent artifice in hanging baskets and jardinières. More than all else, though, this is the age of ivy. This plant was made use of for purposes that are forgotten, now. They trained its tendrils into pyramids and parasols; and, as a pot plant, made round balls of it, clipped like a bay tree. It was formed into fire screens, an idea so characteristic of the 'sixties that it could have been invented at no other period. It was trained upon the backs of sofas and couches. In a monograph devoted especially to the ivy it is written: 'But it is not alone in windows that you see the ivy trained. Ivy often forms a green and fresh screen across a room, being planted in boxes, and its sprays trained over rustic frame-

work. Ivy often casts its pleasant shadow over a pianoforte, so that the musician may sit before his instrument as within a little bower. Ivy may be seen adorning the shrine which hangs upon the wall, or dropping its sprays above the lady's worktable. The staircase in the house of a great painter here is a complete little bit of fairyland, thanks to his love of ivy, which festoons the balustrade of the polished oak stairs, and strews forth its kindly leaves among the rarer beauties of palms and myrtles, which rise grovelike upon the landings. I know an apothecary's shop which is rather like a bit of wild wood, from its growth of ivy, than a shop of physic. I was told, the other day, of a studio, here, equally sylvan; and I know an old cobbler who could not mend his shoes without seeing his ivy bush daily before him as he works.' When reading these sentences, we become completely immersed in the period of which we are treating. That book is as true of its time, as Pepys was of his. We are to think, then, of an ivy-green in its brightest terms; not of the dark and cobwebbed leaves that grow upon the walls. The firescreen will have shimmered like green water; but the

staircase festooned with ivy, and the 'pleasant shadows of the ivy cast over the pianoforte' are of a horrid fantasy which it is impossible to contemplate with a calm mind. We, therefore, bid farewell to this tendrilled interior and seek the light of day.

The Grands Boulevards are no more than half finished. Their alignment is complete but there is scaffolding everywhere. The whole city is rebuilding. This is the first town of the modern world, and there is still no city to compare with it. Yet Baron Haussmann was no genius in architecture. Paris is beautiful through consistency, in conception but not in detail. This morning, in the summer of 1866, it shows in telling contrast to the London we have left. The Seine runs through Paris and is not, as is the Thames, a frontier dividing the capital from what is no better than a longdrawn slum. The stucco deserts of Paddington and Pimlico, of Belgravia and South Kensington, have no equivalent here in Paris. But, having spent the morning, we can eat our luncheon in the Boulevard des Italiens, at the Café Riche or the Maison Dorée. In London,

there is nothing but the chop house. The Café Riche or the Maison Dorée, as well as the excellence of their food, have a name for gaiety and enjoyment that is comparable to the reputation of an operetta of Offenbach or Johann Strauss. This is very different from the oyster rooms of London. They consist of small rooms, much gilded, and with low ceilings, of the sort, in fact, still to be seen at Florian's, in the piazza at Venice. Upstairs, there are the famous salons privés which played so large a part in the scandalous history of the Second Empire. Here, were held supper parties after the play; or, indeed, the final scene of La Vie Parisienne. Those rooms, with their characteristic gilding and their mirrors, all destroyed long ago, have for ourselves the dissipated glamour of a little ridotto of the Settecento, the Casino Venier, for instance, in Venice. The delicate stucco ceilings and walls, the inlaid floors, may cause those little rooms to be haunted by ghosts in mask and domino, but not even the figures whom we know so well in the paintings of Guardi, the gamblers with bird masks and with fur muffs for their hands, are more remote from

us than the patrons of the Café Riche or the Maison Dorée. Any old gentleman sitting in the room with us at luncheon may have been a soldier in Napoleon's wars. But it is not the old so much as the young who are conspicuous. The spread of a crinoline occupies the whole, and more, of a doorway. Because of its shape and size it is always framed for us in the lines of wall and ceiling; it overlaps from the edges of the tablecloth; it obscures the chair or sofa on which its wearer is sitting. It moves in its own scale of sound, which those who have heard it will never forget and which has become, for them, an integral part of the fascination of women. The drawbacks of its size make the measure of technique in its wearers. It is a disadvantage willingly embarked upon, one of those handicaps, like riding side-saddle, which finds its reward in an incomparable attraction. The discrepancy between the crinoline and what it hides is the secret of this. It is a cage, and you must guess between the bars. The art of enticement through concealment has never before in history had such pains devoted to its perfection. Such dazzling ornaments and arabesques, the shot taffetas, the damask reps, the merveilleux, clouded, spotted, checked or marbled, the gold and silver brocades, the lampas figured with golden palms, all the ostentation of these shapes and patterns is but the glass shade, or bell, to hide the figure that is known within.

Perhaps the mere dimension of a crinoline is more impressive in the small rooms or cabinets of the Café Riche or Maison Dorée. Outside, in the afternoon sun, those trembling pyramids, advancing or retreating, have the even and gliding motion of an engine, a very slow engine moving on its rails. This peculiar effect is because you cannot see their feet. The crinoline glides or trembles on its way. Thus, a wide street, or the Boulevard des Italiens, presents an animation which is more slow and deliberate than any street scene that our eyes have witnessed. But, whenever it was possible, the crinoline wearers did not walk. They drove. This was the age of carriages. It was a side of sartorial elegance in which they copied England. The best carriages were built in England; and the horses and the grooms and coachmen came from England. Into this forgotten art it is

impossible for us to enter. We can only be witnesses to this elegance; and it will take us away from the crowded boulevards towards the Bois.

It is now, and in connexion with this, that we meet with Constantin Guys. Our picture of a summer day in Paris in the 'sixties has had no mention, till this moment, of any of the contemporary painters whose names are now famous. This is because they were in revolt against their age. There is only Manet of whom this is not absolutely true. His painting of a summer afternoon in the Tuileries Gardens, now at the National Gallery, with its portraits of himself, Baudelaire and Théophile Gautier, is no less than the document of those long dead summers. No one can look at this picture and not feel the sentiment of that hot afternoon. You can hear the brass band playing under the trees. But, with the exception of this painting by Manet, there is none of the great impressionists who would be in sympathy with our object. We must be contented with the lesser men: Boudin, who painted the Empress Eugénie and her ladies at Trouville: Eugéne Lami, who is described by Baudelaire as 'an artist almost English in his

love of aristocratic elegance': the fashion artists, Compte Calix and Jules David: and now, in this phase to which we have come, Constantin Guys.

This greatest of all amateurs there has ever been had his rôles of dandy, military spectator, and witness of the low life of the cancan and the 'maison close', but our only present concern with him is in his drawings of carriages and horses. In the 'thirties and 'forties Guys had lived a great deal in England. He dressed like an Englishman and affected English words in his conversation. He must have begun drawing at this period. Guys was a Frenchman upon whom the luxury and elegance of English life had profound effect. The portraits of Sir Thomas Lawrence, who was not long dead (he died in 1830), had restored the tradition of Van Dyck that England was a land of fabulous wealth, and of equally fabulous elegance and beauty. In outward sign of this were the equipages, which had not their like in Europe. It was these that Guys set himself to draw, not uninfluenced, it is obvious, by the contemporary Ferneley and Herring. Until the 'fifties it was London, and either Spain or the Orient, that Guys drew. Those of his drawings which have Paris for their subject seem to belong, almost entirely, to the 'fifties and the 'sixties, to the period, shall we say, when he had returned from the Crimean War, where he had made sketches for the Illustrated London News, acting, in fact, as one of the earliest of war correspondents. He was, by now, over fifty years of age, but his best work was to come. It was, now, that he began to make hundreds of drawings of the crinoline and the stovepipe hat. In the 'sixties he attains to the height of his talent; and, after that—though he is abroad in the streets of Paris till he is knocked down and has both legs broken by a carriage, at the time of the carnival of 1885, and lingers for another seven years, till 1892, in a nursing home, the Maison Dubois—during all this time, from 1870 till 1885 it would appear that he had ceased to work. There are no drawings by Guys that can be referred to any date subsequent to the fall of the Empire. It is as though, after the 'sixties, Guys had ceased to be interested in contemporary life. The 'sixties was his golden period. The strange habits of this recluse who would never sign his drawings, who

beneath his mask of a man of the world and dandy spent all his days and nights in observation, and came home in the late hours to his garret, where he drew, this nocturnal worker had an output of drawings which could be numbered by the hundred. And, among them, if, sadly, we remove ourselves from all his other phases, there remain drawings which represent the side of fashionable life that is our subject.

For, now, we are drawing near to the Bois. It is the afternoon; and even, at that, an afternoon in autumn. This is the time of La Vie Parisienne and we advance the date of this, for it will run all through the winter, to an afternoon when there is bright sun and it is intensely cold. Even so, the afternoon is the hour to go driving. The big, new houses, near the Bois, have carriages drawn up before their doors and many a scene is playing that has its counterpart in Constantin Guys. It is only Guys who has fixed that moment when the lady, in her immense crinoline, comes out of the house on to the doorstep at top of the stone stairs. The calèche or brischka waits for her, below. A pair of horses are harnessed to it. A footman holds the door open and the groom stands by the horses. The lady has to hold up her crinoline with both hands in order to descend the steps; and then, like a cloud, she climbs into this boat or skiff and seats herself. The groom has his box seat at the back of the calèche. He holds the reins high above her head, and the calèche goes forward as easily as a gondola and much more swiftly. The lines of this carriage are of an incredible lightness and elegance. Paint and leatherwork are impeccable, for it is Baudelaire who comments upon the artist's remarkable knowledge of accoutrement and coach building. 'Guys', he says, 'draws and paints a carriage, and every kind of carriage, with the same care and ease with which a consummate marine painter treats every kind of craft. All his coach construction is perfectly orthodox; every part is in its right place, and nothing needs correction.'1

There are many other kinds of carriages. The calèche that we have described is the lightest and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> This quotation, and any others that follow, are taken from *The Painter of Victorian Life*, a translation by P. G. Konody, of Baudelaire's *Peintre de la Vie Moderne*, 1865. This edition, with many illustrations of Constantin Guys, was published by the Studio, Ltd., in 1930.

quickest of them all. It is meant for one person only and is overloaded with a friend to sit beside her. But there are, also, the daumonts and the carriages in which it is invariable for a pair of persons to be sitting together. To be alone in the swiftest and most skifflike of carriages is not indelicate; but, to the sensibility of the time, there is something indecorous in sitting, alone, in a carriage where there is room for two. The more solid pace emphasized the impropriety. But a young woman could even drive herself, so long as her equipage went fast enough. On the other hand, the actresses and demi mondaines no less than advertised their charms by the manner in which they were driven. There were ways of sitting in a carriage. The implications of this dumb language may be lost upon us, now. But, indeed, the crinoline might have been specially designed for the display of its folds and billows in an open carriage. Driving in a light pony chaise the crinoline would fill the whole body of the carriage. Were this the summer-and, for a time, again, it is-an open landau with two ladies seated in it, in bonnets and with open parasols, comes past us and the

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billows of their crinolines, like waves upon the shore, beat high up against the coachman's box. Not only does the landau glide past us like a caique or a gondola, but the billowing of their crinolines is as though the ladies, who lazily recline in it, were marine bodies allowed their convention in this covering of foam.

The capitals of this carriage life during the nineteenth century have their peculiar romance which attaches to them. We may mention the Steyne, at Brighton, with its glaring chariots and curricles of the Regency; the Achilles statue and its purlieus in Hyde Park; Seville and its mule drawn carriages in which the 'vanilla coloured ladies ride'; the Toledo at Naples, a narrow street with open carriages going in solid procession, every evening, at a walking pace; the Prater with its Hungarian equipages of Esterhazy and Batthany; and the Champs Elysées leading towards the Bois. We could wish for drawings of all these scenes from the hand of Guys. But, having noticed the start of the afternoon drive, we can do no better than follow it into the Bois. It is a slow and gliding procession; there is but little passing or overtaking. On its way, other carriages join in from every direction until the wide avenue, striped with the shadows of the trees, becomes no more than a stream of traffic. It ends on the banks of the lake.

This is one object of the promenade. It is to the lake in the Bois that the Empress drives, on most afternoons, in her daumont. Sometimes, while going round the lake, the Emperor meets her in his phaeton. He holds the reins himself; an aide-de-camp sits beside him, and two grooms with crossed arms occupy the back seat. On such occasion he asks her to drive with him for a little while and this does not always please her. But it is not, necessarily, those melancholy tours of the lake that we need follow. Our pleasure in the carriages and their occupants will be more intense if we are lost, as it were, in the main stream or body of their progress, not knowing whence they come or whither they are going. Then, we may find ourselves in what Baudelaire terms 'a halt or encampment of carriages'. It has a fantastic improbability. Phaeton, daumont, calèche, clarence, coupé, berlin, barouche, britschka, the grande duc and grande coureuse, the charàbanc and four-in-hand, in their galaxy of paint and varnish all but touch upon each other. Baudelaire notices the 'slender young men and women, attired in the eccentric costumes authorized by the season, standing on the cushions, on the seats and on the roofs, witnessing some event of the turf being decided in the distance'. But our own preference is for the slow advance of this encampment, for the rolling of its wheels.

It must not be so hot that we are in a swoon or dream of heat. Under the trees, the top-hatted dandies are sitting, cigar in mouth, straddling on a chair, or with legs extended and their feet upon a second chair. They prefer their own company and make remarks upon the passing carriages and their occupants. Their very attitudes bespeak the lazy hours that lie before them. It is deep summer; and these tyros are the mayflies of the day. This is their place of gathering; or in the foyer of the theatre. It seemed to be for ever and has quickly passed. This leisurely pastime of the hot afternoons has gone for ever. It is incompatible with the motor car. An age cannot but seem remote in our eyes

that could do no better than use trained animals for locomotion. This may have been the ultimate elegance of horse and carriage but that mere fact relates it into the general or universal past. The afternoon encampment of these carriages, in all their different forms, has the strongly marked marine analogies that we have noticed. It might be an assembly in the halls of Thetis, in those blue bowers open to the skies. And the men and women of the 'cylindre' and the crinoline are as improbable as triton or mermaid to our disillusioned gaze.

But it is necessary to correct this focus in order to look upon them with eyes that can praise their elegance and be unaware that it is fading. We see the carriages break up that encampment and glide slowly home, down the even waters in between the trees. It is turning to autumn. Already, we have left the melancholy contours of the lake and its white swans. The quickest of the daumonts comes past, and, in the words of Baudelaire, who must have seen this, 'the Emperor disappears in the midst of a vortex of light and dust down the avenues of the Bois de Boulogne'. The days are shortening.

This reverie of summer on a winter day brings us, with the fading of its images, to our winter of 1866. It is that afternoon on which we started, when there is bright sun and it is intensely cold. The crinolines no longer fill the carriages with their billowy clouds. Heavy, fur rugs now wrap them round. The Emperor and Empress are skating in the Bois. Every afternoon, for ten days, they have driven in their daumont to the Cercle des Patineurs, in the enclosure of the Tir aux pigeons.1 There, we are told, the 'lac gelé se transformait en grand salon'. Hundreds of persons are looking on. The Emperor skates in a calm way, in a close fitting long coat, or paletot, his tall top-hat glistening in the sun, his long moustache blowing on the wind, with an air as if he is pursuing some abstract thought, and paying no attention to the moving and tumbling throng around him. He is a good skater, and, quite often, takes one of the young ladies of the Court with him on his arm. The Empress,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> This took place in the hard winters of 1866-67, and 1869-70. Cf. Les Tuileries sous le Second Empire, by Jacques Boulenger, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1932, pp. 136,137.

dressed in dark colours and wearing a veil, does not skate so well as her husband and leans heavily on the arm of her cavalier. Once or twice she has a fall and the crowd, many of whom disapprove of the shortness of her crinoline, are not pleased to see her on the arm of a man and falling, in this way, in public.

To this scene, with its echoes of 'Les Patineurs', that familiar waltz by Waldteufel, the early darkness descends. And, now, all the gas lights are lit. The whole city is glittering with lights through glass windows. Cafés on the Grands Boulevards are thronged with people: string bands are playing. It is easy to pass an hour, or two hours, in this way, listening to music. It has long been dark. People are dining; or have dined, and are, now, waiting, as if for time to pass. Many of them are standing. It is the bar of the Bouffes-Parisiennes. A bell rings, and another act begins.

This third act is the Festin. It has been organized by Gardefeu in honour of the Baron de Gondremarck and his wife. A salon of the Café Anglais is the scene but, just for the sake of appearances, Gardefeu gives the Baron to understand that the Swiss Admiral, to whom he has lately been presented, is the host. Whether the Baron believes this or not is of little importance. He is enjoying himself too much, in any case, to protest. The guests are valets-dechambres, concierges, maids, shopgirls, all in their best dresses, and alive to the occasion. They can be called anything they like—Madame de Folle-Verdure, Madame de Quimper-Karadec. All the 'fantoches' of the piece are assembled.

This festin, it will be realized, has been given nightly for many weeks on end. It is curious, therefore, to think of its original actors. Zulma Bouffar was the gantière Gabrielle; Céline Montaland, as fair as a Scandinavian, was the Baronne de Gondremarck; Mlle. Honorine, than whom, apparently, no choice could have been better, was Métella; Léontine Massin, whom we have met before, was Madame de Folle-Verdure. As for the men, Brasseur played the Brazilian and, such was his versatility, Frick and Prosper, two other small rôles, as well; Hyacinthe was the Baron de Gondremarck; Priston

was Gardefeu; Gil Pérès, Bobinet; Lassouche, a famous actor, contented himself with the part of Urbain, a head waiter who, in the last scene of the play, has one of the best songs in the piece. It has a chorus of young waiters and consists in the advice given to them by Urbain, their chief, upon how to conduct themselves in their responsible situation in the Café Anglais. They must be discreet: 'Fermons les yeux' is the burden of his song: 'Ne gênons pas les amoureux.' And the orchestration of this song has more than a suggestion of the cancan in it. This music, in fact, is the sublimation of the cancan. No music is more instinct than this with the measure of its period in time.

We are to remember that every morning, for many months on end, this company of actors had woken from the festin of the night before into a new day that would end in this identical manner. It is more than seventy years ago. We have to consider the dawn of a winter day for Mme. Zulma Bouffar, Céline Montaland, Honorine, Leontine Massin; and for Brasseur, Hyacinthe, Priston, Gil Pérès and Lassouche. It would come with the first foot upon the creaking

wooden stair. Coffee and a petit pain are upon the way. We can see the folded clothes upon the chair, the exiguous washing stand, letters in the slanting French hand, the shoes with pointed toes, the fiacres and horse-drawn buses, the red, red bricks and polished pitch pine. And so another day would pass, with a call at the theatre for a message or for letters.

In the evening this festin of La Vie Parisienne came near and nearer. The shuddering of the batterie de cuivres proclaimed its coming. For this real gaiety, this diction in which the word 'champagne' is heard as often as you can hear the three syllables of 'vendetta' in any opera by Verdi, has its apotheosis, here, in this third act of La Vie Parisienne. The project is to entertain the Baron de Gondremarck while Bobinet and Gardefeu can amuse themselves with the Baroness. An intoxication of pleasure is the purpose and this is induced, in the audience, by every device in music. The scene must be a painted room blazing with chandeliers and girandoles. It requires a big stage, larger than any private room at the Café Anglais; but this is a necessary convention, it is the heightening of

the illusion. We have to believe in this, just as, when the theatre orchestra enlarges and exaggerates the beauty of letter song or serenade, when the harp or the harpsichord assumes the whole body of the music and contradicts, in this, every possibility of fact, it is of no point to cavil at the enlargement of the truth. Instead, this is the golden moment. It is an intoxication such as circumstances can never allow in life. Neither can present day popular music, an importation into this continent and a mating, at that, of the negro and the Jew, ever achieve this inebriation from pure sound. The words, now, are too idiotic or too sentimental; they are sophisticated, even, into a skilfulness in rhyme which only slurs and embarasses the ruder melody. But, with Offenbach, and in the hands of Meilhac and Halévy, the wit of the words and the rhymes is in exact accord with the music. Neither can outpace, nor be any detraction from the other. The scene begins with the song: 'Son habit a craqué dans le dos.' It is the chanson à boire, the drinking song. Later on, this is to become intensified out of all proportion to its original. That will be in the quadrille. But this

chanson à boire, also, has its rhythms of the cancan. Indeed, the whole of the music for La Vie Parisienne stands in relation to the cancan as does the music of the Rosenkavalier to the Viennese waltz. Its insistence, or dominance, is always in the background of the tune. And, at moments, it will hold the whole scene.

The grotesque characters at the festin cannot be too exaggerated in their oddity. Anything, or everything, may be worn by the Swiss Admiral. It is, however, essential for him to wear immense golden epaulettes and carry a telescope or a speaking trumpet. The fact that it is a fancy dress ball for all concerned except the Baron de Gondremarck doubles the gaiety; and this is true of it in the sense in which a doubling of the brass instruments in the orchestra increases the fire and brilliance of the sound beyond all precedent. The best proving of this is in the case of Berlioz. On occasion, when one of his greater works, the Grand Messe des Morts or the Te Deum is to be performed with an augmented orchestra the opportunity has occurred to give, as well, his military marches, the Rakoczy or the Marche des Troyens, with these increased

forces. Then, the effect is exciting and intoxicating beyond the imagination. So it is with this festin of La Vie Parisienne. It should always be done with particular regard to the effects of the brass instruments. If these are added to, and it would be more effective; still, were it for this scene only, then there is nothing in all theatrical music to compare with this. Fledermaus, which was given eight years later, in 1871, apart from its overture, the masterpiece of Johann Strauss, has too much dialogue and too little music. The dialogue, moreover, being in German, could not but appear to disadvantage by contrast to the French of Meilhac and Halévy. Fledermaus, it is needless to remark, has some music that is immortal. The writer has, on another occasion, been taken at fault for saying that Mozart, could he have heard it, would prefer the Fledermaus of Johann Strauss to the Ring of the Nibelungs. This truism is more especially applicable to the overture. The speed of inspiration that this seems to foretell for the rest of the opera is to some extent belied by the slow action of the piece and its long spaces of dialogue. Fledermaus is music written about gaiety: it is not gaiety

itself. But for the Franco-Prussian War, and the splitting of the French and German-speaking worlds into two irreparable parts, there might well have been, in the 'seventies, a closer rivalry between Johann Strauss and Offenbach. The French and Viennese schools of comic opera might, then, have surpassed themselves in direct competition with each other. There is, however, in parenthesis, this one interesting detail that is concerned with Belle Lurette, an operetta which is the last work of Offenbach, written during his finishing touches to the Contes d'Hoffmann and left uncompleted by him. Léo Delibes, in fact, added the final touches to it and orchestrated the overture. The interest of Belle Lurette lies in the parody of The Blue Danube waltz that it contains, a parody that might be added to this banquet scene of La Vie Parisienne after the manner in which the tunes of other composers are admitted, at one moment only, in Don Giovanni and in the Barber of Seville. The historical anachronism of adding a parody written in 1880 of a tune composed in 1874, to a scene of an opera dating from 1866, would excuse itself in this instance because of

exceptional circumstances. It should, and it must surely be, most appropriate to La Vie Parisienne.

The chanson à boire comes soon after the opening of the scene. It is unfortunately true that no translation can ever give the effect of these songs. They have to be, and can only be, sung in French. It is, also, to be remembered that, excellent as the revivals may be of La Vie Parisienne that are given, from time to time, in Paris, the original art of the opera bouffe no longer exists. Its actors and actresses are dead and their tradition has died. A performance can be given that relies upon old memories and has the authenticity of early photographs of the company to proceed upon, but all this can be no more than a faded copy of its pristine force. An opera which was written in the 'sixties in order to be exactly typical of its time, even of its particular year, cannot expect to survive threequarters of a century and still remain entirely accurate to its purposes. It is of the original performances, then, that we must think. This was the apotheosis of the Paris of Napoleon III, of Baron Haussmann, Paris was the first modern city of the world, of a modernity which,

now, is old-fashioned and antiquarian. But the race of boulevardiers, all dead, is the proof of this consciousness. Their boast was that they never left Paris. Its improvements brought the whole world to the capital. Anyone who left it retired into the mists of the past. This was the first modern city since the Rome of the Caesars. Speed, we must remember, had only just been invented. It took Napoleon I as long to go from Rome to Paris as it did Julius Caesar. In two thousand years the rate of travel had not altered. The change had only just come. It had only been in operation for twenty years. You could travel in a train all through the night and wake up half way across Europe; but, in the minds of the boulevardiers, all travel was in a subjective direction, towards Paris. We have a confirmation of this state of mind in the characters of Baron de Gondremarck and the Brazilian. They have made their way from the ends of the earth in order to reach Paris. And so, we may add, have the ancestors of Offenbach and of Ludovic Halévy. Only they are there already; they have anticipated Baron de Gondremarck and the Brazilian.

It is apparent, by now, that the Baron bears

no ill will for the deceptions that have been practised upon him. There is no malice or cruelty in this piece, but a condition, it must be admitted, of complete immorality. But it is the same Elysium, for all that, which reigns in the Nozze di Figaro. Nobody is left out. Everyone is involved so that it weighs equally upon all. Baron de Gondremarck has his recompense in the company of Métella; while, had it not been for his own importunity to have his letter of introduction delivered to her, the situation would not have developed into its present complexity. It was Baron de Frascata, his predecessor with Métella, who made the suggestion and let loose this avalanche of intrigue. Frascata is now, we are given to understand, far away and thinking all the time of Paris. It is not his fault that he is not here, enjoying 'les flons-flons de l'operétte et les refrains du café-concert'. For, after all, this is only the theatre; not life itself but a mirror held up for it to look into and see itself. Métella has nearly forgotten Frascata, with whom she spent the summer days of the year before. Soon, she will have forgotten Gondremarck.

All the illusions and half-illusions of the piece are made manifest in the chanson à boire. The words 'Son habit a craqué dans le dos' should give the clue of falsity to everyone, Gondremarck included. But Gondremarck, on the contrary, is to be observed making fun of the Swiss Admiral and not in the least influenced by his fictitious importance. Meanwhile, the tables are brought forward laden with bottles of champagne and the scene continues. More and more fantastic figures are introduced. Madame de Folle-Verdure and Madame de Quimper-Karadec, in their immense hoops, fill a long sofa between them. Gabrielle and Pauline and Métella wear crinolines as wide as the round sofas of the time, or as wide as the circumference of the crystal chandeliers. A numerous chorus should accompany them, in whom all the vagaries of fashion as portrayed by Compte Calix or Jules David, by Constantin or the demoiselles Noël, can be displayed. This is, in short, a wonderful opportunity for the costume designer. The men of the piece, who are not 'en travesti', wear the evening clothes of the date, which are not so much altered from

our own. They only have that amount of difference which is necessary in order to turn them into ghosts of the present. They have the black trousers and black tail coats of our own day, only different in cut. The trousers nearly cover the tops of the shoes, which are pointed. And the waistcoats and collars and ties, the white shirt fronts still with a suspicion of the earlier frills about them, are subtly different and changing in a hundred ways. Also, for the men in the original production, fashionable correctness could not have been possible. Even in those days Savile Row found a poor substitute in a French theatrical tailor. Their clothes will have been full of incongruities. They will have been wrong in all the little details. This, of course, combined with the exquisite precision of the women's clothes, designed by the best houses, will have furthered the extreme fantasy of the play.

The champagne is poured out, glass after glass. Toasts are drunk and every character lifts the champagne to his lips and puts it down empty, to be filled again. This is the moment at which Offenbach excels himself. It is necessary

for Baron de Gondremarck to become a little drunk. Toast after toast is proposed and, as well, Gabrielle or Pauline, and, most of all, Métella, ply him with drink and, themselves, drain their glasses and call for more. The piece becomes vertiginous and drunk with tunes. In Viennese music it is the strings that are vehicles for intoxication. The violins intone the Viennese waltz, or it is preluded by the cymbalon. But, with Offenbach, inebriation of the senses is brought about by the brass instruments which sound out in the light rhythms, strongly accented, that have never, before or since, been given such a daring treatment of the dance. Also, the incredibly quick patter of the choruses brings about a vitality that no other light music possesses. Such choruses are the special genius of Offenbach, who could write them down, no two alike, in the distraction of a roomful of people, or even at the last possible moment, while driving in a cab to the theatre. The chanson à boire becomes distorted and different in meaning when it is taken from the Swiss Admiral and given to the chorus to sing. Soon, it will undergo still further transformation. Mean-

while, the attitudes and utterances become more and more intoxicated. A general dance begins. The stage is a whirlpool, turning, turning in a hundred convolutions, for the great width of the crinolines fills its space twice over. This is more exciting, even, than the Tyrolienne of the previous act. And, by now, the characters of the play have become impossible to part from. They are as indelibly remembered as the persons on board ship during a long sea voyage. The moment of parting must come; but the climax is not yet reached. It is possible to bask in the certainty of that, knowing it is not far off. For the excitement gathers and gathers. It is an orgy to which only the Banquet of Trimalchio can be compared. Both of them are orgies of an imperial capital. That was Rome, and this is Paris of the Second Empire, the city of pleasure of the modern world. But the Banquet of Trimalchio had no music. It was of an age of flutes or pipes. This has all the battery of the brass instruments, inventions which daze and bewilder and bemuse the senses. It is the speed of the modern world in a tangible form sharing the quickened wits of the metropolis, the town of a

million souls. It is the whole town turning, turning in the dance.

But, now, another music begins. This is the play within the play. The dances traditional to the third act of an opera are about to start. Gondremarck and Métella, Gabrielle and Pauline, Madame de Quimper-Karadec and Madame de Folle-Verdure, the Swiss Admiral, Prosper and Gontran and Gardefeu and Bobinet, are all of them of secondary importance, now. The divertissement of La Vie Parisienne is the culmination of its wonders. We are given, one after another, all the popular dances of the day. Waltz follows on waltz and the polka comes after it. These dance tunes are an extraordinary embodiment of their age. They are the clothing of its bones with flesh and blood. Every phase in them is like the turn in a familiar conversation, or they create, at a stroke, the dresses of the dancers. This scene, or this moment of the divertissement has, in truth, a resemblance of spirit and of matter to the banquet scene of Don Giovanni. Its tunes have that same action upon the skin of the sensitive listener, that tingling effect which in the lore of ancient India signified

the presence of the god. It is, in fact, the descent of genius upon the earth, for that can manifest itself in moments such as this when time is held back and the past stands still. A sort of immortality is conferred so that, during those long and lengthening periods when the music is not given, it has, yet, an independent existence apart from its closed prison within the pages of the printed book. A moment in the past, if no more, is given back its breath to breathe.

These tunes are the popular dances of 1866. Among them is the Redowa, a peculiar and characteristic form of waltz, of which the name, alone, is redolent of that particular time. The very sound of that title, quite apart from the music of which it consists, seems to convey this feeling. It is danced by the principals of the corps de ballet, perhaps by two pairs of them, and could be described as a spinning and well-emphasized waltz, danced with much reversing, which makes it entirely different from the graceful or languorous waltz, as it is different, again, from the German waltz. In fact, it was too specialized a form of dance to remain long in

favour and, within a year or two, had lost its fashionable glitter and sunk down lower in the social scale to become the prize event in popular dance halls. This is the fate, it must be admitted, of most of the tunes that were once fashionable. When Estudiantina, the waltz in Spanish time by Waldteufel, is heard in the circus or the music hall it is difficult to believe that this was the fashionable tune of 1865 or 1866. And the same thing can be said of Les Patineurs, also by Waldteufel, of which the distant echoes have already been heard in these pages in the enclosure of the Tir aux pigeons, when 'le lac gelé se transformait en grand salon'. But Estudiantina and Les Patineurs, perhaps, also, the beautiful Les Sirènes, have survived all the changes of fashion. Their virtual immortality has already lasted them for threequarters of a century. The Redowa, which is not less characteristic, is untarnished and uncontaminated. It will be the first time most persons in the audience have ever heard it.

After the Redowa comes the quadrille. This has been formed by Offenbach out of some of the principal tunes in the piece, only, to this

purpose, they have had to be slightly altered in shape and, therefore, in meaning. It distorts and changes the themes so that they become sardonic and are, as it were, in caricature. This transformation of character is of most peculiar effect. The altered forms of the tunes in this quadrille have an analogy in the last part of Liszt's Faust symphony when the themes that had sounded innocent or pleading and had made, in fact, the portrait of Gretchen become converted into sneering and sarcastic forms. It is, indeed, a study in demoniac possession and, here, in this quadrille of La Vie Parisienne a comparable transmutation has taken place, only its purposes are those of drunken gaiety. It might be said that there has never been music so suggestive of this as the dances that are under discussion. The quadrille is constructed, in the first place, from the chanson à boire, only its emphasis is given to the trombones who, for effect, might, indeed, in added number, be placed in the stage boxes. It becomes a cancan of delirious intensity, is given part of one of the choruses with which to fulfil its pattern and then, with many stabbings of the

brass, returns again and again into the deliberate cancan. After this comes a part of the quadrille which is more conventionally itself, except that the refrain, or second half of that, has the turns of the tarantella, a dance which was a favourite with Offenbach, who wrote some inimitably witty music in that measure, and then the chanson à boire comes back once more, augmented, if that is possible, in its crude and angular violence.

After the end of the quadrille this orgy or festin goes with such a speed and force that it is impossible to follow its order of events. The dancing becomes general. Baron de Gondremarck should, at this point, be crowned with a wreath of roses. Then, in his antiquated evening clothes, which have a hint of the diabolical, of the gentleman in black about them, he becomes the statue of a satyr. The effectiveness of this is that you can almost see his goat feet hidden in his patent leather shoes. His hairy goat legs are where his calves should be. His wreath of roses, or of eglantine, hides the sprouting horns upon his forehead. He is the goat king, or satyr king, the Priapus of the Festin; or even Offenbach,

himself, as the devil at the feast. And then, as suddenly, he is the actor playing Baron de Gondremarck.

For, now, there is a tremendous and final chorus of vertiginous speed. 'Tout tourne, tout danse' is its refrain. This is of a rapidity to which there is no parallel in the arts; nor is any other music, than this, the music of real frenzied enjoyment. The whole company are whirling, whirling, glass in hand. A moment later the final strophe comes, ever quicker, quicker, and ending, as ever, in the movements of the cancan. This is the last time we can see the painted scene for that private room at the Café Anglais, the chandeliers, the girandoles, the crinolines, that evening of 1866 blazing in its lights. For the delirium ends in military precision with full forces of the orchestra, till the last final shuddering of the brass. And the curtain falls.

It may be lifted many times; but the music has gone and, without that, the figures have no life. These few moments, then, are our tribute to Offenbach who made them live. But, of his hundred operas and operettas, La Vie Parisienne is but one instance and, that, not necessarily the

best. Such, at least, in one solitary phase of his creation, was the comic genius of music. And no one who has ever heard *La Vie Parisienne* can deny this title to Offenbach. It is a world that he occupies to himself, and in which no other man can approach him.











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